

Look Alikes

While shopping in Walmart recently, my heart skipped a beat. I had to do a double take when I thought I saw my mother in one of the aisles. My mother died over 10 years ago. I called my husband over to look at this lady, and he agreed. I finally went up to her and said, "Forgive me for staring, but you look like my mother." She surprisingly gave me a hug and began to sing in my ear. I asked if I could take her picture. My children and grandchildren all agreed, "That looks like Grandma Thieme!"

Coincidence or not? I don't know, but I do know that it made me reminisce about Mom. Moms don't have to do grandeur things, but it is the ordinary little love taps that we cherish. For me...

Mom taught me my prayers. When I was afraid at night, she would crawl in bed with me until I fell asleep. If I had a tummy ache, it was a minty mixture she made to settle my tummy. She taught me to iron clothes, starting with the handkerchiefs and pillowcases. She would make soft-boiled eggs, placing them on a napkin inserted on the top of a glass. Then she'd crack the end open and give us toasted bread strips for dipping in the egg. She made us coffee treats by breaking pieces of bread in a mug and adding coffee, cream and sugar to it. After I was married, I remember her singing and rocking my children when she came to visit. There were bags of groceries and treats she would bring for the kids. She continued to make large batches of food at home, and would send most of it home with us when we came to visit. She loved for me to join her at sing-a-longs in the nursing home. I will always remember the joy on her face when she gave me an angel music box that she purchased with her Bingo fun money at the nursing home.

Our family was never the type to hug or kiss or say, "I love you." But, as Mom and Dad got older, we could do it more freely. As she neared death, she would tell me, "I'm ready to go, and when I do, I don't want you to cry." "Oh, Mom! What kind of a daughter would I be if I didn't cry?!"

So finding this lady recently that so much resembled my mother, was truly a blessing. It helped me recall many cherished moments. With Mother's Day this month, I hope that everyone had the opportunity to recall the many memories shared with their mothers. And should there be any unpleasant memory you recall, I am sure it is outweighed by the many beautiful ones.

MOM

IS JUST

WOW

UPSIDE DOWN

W

elcome every stumbling block
And every thorn and jagged rock,
For each one is a
Stepping stone
To God who wants you
For his own.

Searching for God

I recently went through a tough spell in life, and I can't quite put my finger on why. I will chalk it up as the effects of the long, doldrums of winter we had. It was as if I was going through the motions of my Faith by attending Mass, Adoration, prayer, but not allowing it to sink into my heart and soul like I wanted it to and like it should. So it was a challenging time for me. But, I knew I could not give up, could not throw in the towel—so to speak, and walk away from God, the Church and all the friends I have made. So, I kept on going. I felt like I was walking in a long hallway filled with clutter, and unable to reach the door at the other end of the hall. I knew this clutter to be some of the things in my life that I needed to let go of. Finally I stumbled while walking that long stretch, and who was there to pick me up? Jesus in the Sacrament of Confession. I went to Confession, but it didn't seem like any progress was being made. I had to repeat the same sins in Confession the next time I went. But, I kept going. Then one time I was given a penance that finally helped me open my eyes to this truth: **Life is a gift from God, and I am loved by him "no matter what."** My penance was to "count my blessings." This taught me to focus on the gifts, rather than the hindrances. I began to take each day in stride, always remembering that God loves me, even when I feel I am just going through the motions, and even when I go to Confession with the same sins as the time before that.

So I continue to count the blessings, look forward to the new beginnings that come with the Easter Season, with Spring, and with the new life. God spoke to me through the car radio today through these song lyrics, "God's not done with you. God's not done writing your story." Thank you, God for this reminder, that you continue to work through me (through each one of us), even on days when we find it difficult to believe.

TV Dad

Progressive Auto Insurance has several television ads that include "TV DAD." TV Dad is made out to be kinder and wiser than our biological dads. TV Dad solves all our problems. TV Dad is so wise that he knows how much we will save by switching our car insurance to Progressive. TV Dad may know about insurance, but our Dads are pretty smart too. They are often wise because of life's experiences. But no one can beat our Dad—our Father in heaven. Following is a poem I found by poet Steve Turner, who wrote it, geared toward children—but then, aren't we all God's children?

My Dad

*My dad's bigger than your dad.
My dad's as tall as the moon,
as strong as the wind,
as wide as the sky.
You should see my dad!
He's got stars in his fists.
He bends rainbows on his knee.
When he breathes, clouds move.

He's good, my dad.
You can't scare him with the dark.
You can't scare him with guns or sticks.
He makes bullies say sorry just by staring.
Big green monsters fall asleep on his lap.
Ghosts start haunting each other.*

*My dad's been everywhere
but he says he likes the world.
Earth people are fun, he says.
My dad knows more than any teacher.
He knows everything.
He knows what you're thinking,
even when you try to trick him by thinking
something else.
If you tell a lie my dad says he can tell
by the look on your face.*

*My dad's the best dad ever.
I say I love him
a million times a million
times a million times a million trillion.*

*My dad says he loves me
a billion trillion times more than that.
My dad likes to love.
My dad made the world.*

Learning to Prioritize

Most of us have heard of Steve Jobs, co-founder, chairman and CEO of Apple. He died a billionaire at the age of 56 of cancer. The following words could be considered a farewell speech before he died:

I reached the pinnacle of success in the business world. However, aside from work I have little joy. At this moment lying on my bed and recalling my life, I realize that all the recognition and wealth I took so much pride in have paled and become meaningless in the face of death. You can employ someone to drive the car for you, make money for you, but you cannot have someone bear your sickness for you. There is one thing that can never be found when it is lost: LIFE. Treasure your love for your family, spouse and friends. Keep yourself well and cherish others. As we grow older and hopefully wiser, we realize that a \$3,000 or a \$30 watch both tell the same time. You will realize that your true inner happiness does not come from material things of the world. Eat food as medicine. Otherwise you have to eat medicine as your food. There is a big difference between a human being and being human. Only a few really understand that. You are loved when you are born; you will be loved when you die. In between, you have to manage.

I was impressed with that message, and did some research of other speeches by Jobs. I discovered this speech he made to a graduating class:

No one wants to die, even people who want to go to heaven don't want to die to get there. Yet, death is a destination we all share. No one has ever escaped it. And that is as it should be, because death is very likely the single best invention of life. It's life's changing agent. It clears out the old to make way for the new. Right now the new is you [graduates], but someday not too long from now, you will gradually become the old. Your time is limited. So don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't let the noise of other's opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.

I have read these speeches over a few times, and they are so true. We want to get to heaven. We don't want to die today, but we know it will happen some day. When we put flowers on some of the family graves this week, we saw many without flowers or remembrance. But I would guess that even those with undecorated graves once made a difference in the lives of others.

And for those graduating this year, remember these important words, "Most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. Somehow they know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary." Where does that courage and intuition stem from? From the Holy Spirit received in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, and which continues to be our Guiding Light. We truly must strive to lead a life filled with virtue and integrity, going outside ourselves and thinking of others. Everything else—the wealth and riches of this world do not hold any importance. As Jobs said, "Everything else is secondary."

It's Puzzling

I haven't put a puzzle together in years and I know my children can put one together twice as fast as I do. But I do know how discouraging it can be when you finish a puzzle and there is a piece missing! This spring I saw a puzzle at a garage sale that caught my eye—a colorful pair of cardinals. I knew the people at the sale, and thought, "Surely all the pieces will be here." As I began putting the puzzle together, I was able to ponder on some important faith factors.

First off for a puzzle, we must find a good table or board to work on. Then we sort and put together the edge pieces. [This is like building a solid foundation. That is what Baptism does for us. It gets us off on the right track, and we continue on that track by Faith Formation and the use of the Sacraments.]

Next, we sort the puzzle pieces by color or by the picture on each piece. Then we begin the search. [Sometimes starting a task can be overwhelming, and it may be easy to say, "Forget it. I will never get this finished." That's where perseverance comes into play. Many times in life we wonder where God is leading us, but we must persevere and trust that with "stick-to-it-tiveness," we can accomplish what we set out to do.]



If the pieces don't fit right, we may need to look back and see if a piece was earlier misplaced. [Sometimes in life, when we cannot seem to move forward, we may need to backtrack and see where we went awry, and what we need to do to make progress. That's where prayer and sacraments come into play again.] A friend once told me, "If a puzzle piece doesn't fit where you think it should go, turn it upside down and try again." [We have to continually turn to the Holy Spirit for guidance. We may think we are headed in the right direction, but sometimes God surprises us and wants us to take an unexpected turn.]

There are times we need to refer to the cover of the puzzle box in order to continue. [Scripture is a good resource for us. Don't just look at its cover while it sits on your shelf. Open it and search for your answers.]

The more we work on the puzzle, the more the picture becomes visible. We get excited and anxious to finish it. [When we work toward a spiritual goal and see the results that are happening by following God's plan, we do get excited. We praise God for helping us accomplish what we set out to do.]

Lastly, the finished project is completed! [That's when we reach that "Awww!" moment for what we have accomplished, yet always remembering that God was the Mastermind behind it all.]

So, I finished the puzzle, and guess what? There was one piece missing again—right smack in the middle. After checking the floor carefully and looking under the chair cushions, I realized I got duped again. This made me think that the puzzle of my life, with its many years, and its ups and downs, is never complete, unless God is at the center of it all. It is He who makes the picture of our lives complete.